CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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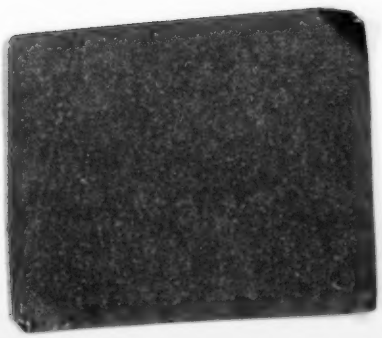
LETTER DATED 24 MARCH 1997 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SOUTH AFRICA ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT TRANSMITTING A PRESS STATEMENT DATED 20 FEBRUARY 1997 BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE CONCERNING THE POLICY OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT ON ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES AND THE MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT MANDELA TO THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL NGO CONFERENCE ON LANDMINES, MAPUTO, 25 TO 28 FEBRUARY 1997

I have the honour to attach, for circulation in an official document of the Conference, a press statement dated 20 February 1997 by the Minister of Defence concerning the policy of the South African Government on anti-personnel landmines and the message from President Mandela to the Fourth International NGO Conference on Landmines, Maputo, 25 to 28 February 1997.

(Signed): J.S. Selebi
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



PRESS STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE, THE HON. MR J MODISE: SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT POLICY ON ANTI-PERSONNEL LANDMINES, PARLIAMENT, 20 FEBRUARY 1997

QUOTE

Members of the media,

Thank you for your attendance here today.

Together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I have called this press conference to announce the policy position of the South African Government on anti-personnel landmines.

I am pleased to inform you that, on my recommendation and motivation, Cabinet decided, on the 19th of February 1997, to ban the use, development, production and stockpiling of anti-personnel landmines - with immediate effect.

We thereby fully endorse the conviction of the International Committee of the Red Cross, that, and I quote:

> "The limited military utility of anti-personnel mines is far outweighed by the appalling humanitarian consequences of their use in actual conflicts.

On this basis their prohibition and elimination should be pursued as a matter of utmost urgency by governments and the entire international community".

Ladies and Gentlemen, in adopting this position, the South African Government, through our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is reinforcing efforts to bring about a universal ban on these mines and their complete elimination.

We will resolutely pursue this objective, and do everything possible to encourage and influence governments and international institutions to adopt this position.

Out commitment in this respect is a matter of record since our accession to office.

In 1994 we announced a moratorium on the export of all land mines. This was followed, in 1996, by a complete ban on exports of all forms of land mines. And yesterday, the 19th of February 1997, this commitment was taken a step further when Cabinet decided on a total prohibition on the use, development, production and stockpiling of anti-personnel land mines - with immediate effect.

In terms of this decision, we will be preparing to destroy our stockpile of existing anti-personnel land mines, which amount to 160 000. We will be retaining a very limited and verifiable number of anti-personnel land mines, solely for training specific military

personnel in de-mining techniques and for research into assisting the de-mining process. All de-mining training and research will be carried out under the strictest government supervision and control.

I must stress, that until all countries have co-operated in eliminating all stockpiles of anti-personnel land mines, there is no guarantee that they may not be used. As long as the threat exists, our National Defence Force must be capable of dealing with the need to de-activate and clear this menace, and to neutralise it if we are confronted by it in an operational situation. It therefore follows that we must maintain the capability and skill required to perform that task.

Cabinet's decision reflects our determination to help rid the world of the problem of anti-personnel land mines. Each month these mines kill or maim some 2 000 victims around the world - the vast majority of whom are civilians. Their indiscriminate use has had a devastating effect - internationally, in Africa and in our region. In Angola, the number of amputations, resulting from anti-personnel mines, is, tragically, one of the highest in the world, and in Mozambique, thousands of these mines remain uncleared. The injuries from these mines impose an intolerable burden on civil society and a severe constraint on reconstruction and developmental needs.

A heavy responsibility lies on the more developed countries, capable of producing this weapon, to cease production, export and use.

This grave international problem can only be addressed by concerted international acting to restrict the availability and use of land mines, and to alleviate the suffering they cause.

We believe it is possible to confront the menace, and South Africa will do everything possible to assist in the eradication of anti-personnel land mines from the face of our globe.

On a practical level:

At the UN International Meeting on Mine Clearance, held in Geneva in 1995, South Africa pledged assistance to training programmes for the UN Stand-By Capacity for mine clearance - involving management of de-mining, mine lifting and mine awareness.

Regionally, we signed a Declaration of Intent with the Government of Mozambique in 1995, whereby both governments will co-operate in de-mining efforts.

And South Africa is assisting Angola through the training of de-mining personnel for the Angolan De-Mining Institute.

Furthermore, a South African company specialising in de-mining, is involved in de-mining activities in Angola in co-operation with the

United Nations.

In March 1996, we became a State Party to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to have Indiscriminate Effects (and Protocols) - CCW - Which amongst other things, restricts the use of land mines.

In additional to the aforementioned measures, South Africa is a signatory to the Ottawa Declaration of October 1996 - working for a global ban on anti-personnel landmines.

And South Africa was one of the original co-sponsors of the December 1996 UN General Assembly Resolution - supported by 155 countries - on "An international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines".

The ban I have announced today is an integral part of our Government's overall commitment to the promotion of international peace and security.

With this announcement, we give our fullest support and endorsement of the Fourth International NGO Conference of Land Mines, which will be held in Maputo, Mozambique, from 25 - 28 February 1997.

I pledge that we will do everything possible to help rid the world of the menace of the anti-personnel land mine.

I thank you.

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MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT NELSON MANDELA TO THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL NGO CONFERENCE ON LANDMINES, MAPUTO, 25 - 28 FEBRUARY 1997

QUOTE

The indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines has brought immense suffering to Africa. These terrible weapons are causing death and inhumane injuries to our people. They place severe constraints on reconstruction and development, particularly in rural areas. The legacy of millions of emplaced landmines in Southern Africa, particularly in Angola and Mozambique, have left areas uninhabitable and will pose significant challenges to the region's limited resources and great development needs.

This grave problem can only be addressed by concerted international action which deals with it in a comprehensive manner, and restricts the availability and use of landmines and alleviating the suffering they cause.

South Africa remains fully committed to the Ottawa Declaration we subscribed to in October 1996. In that context we would want to work with others to ensure the earliest possible conclusion of a legally-binding international agreement to ban anti-personnel landmines.

South Africa will furthermore do everything possible to assist in the eradication of anti-personnel landmines. In this regard I give our fullest support and endorsement of the Fourth International NGO Conference on Landmines.

Nelson Mandela
President
Republic of South Africa

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